

D&D Fiction

Old Salt Tales, Part 3

Stormwrack Fiction
by Joseph D. Carriker, Jr.



Josen slipped gratefully into the warm galley, shedding his soaking shirt and hanging it on a peg along with quite a few others like it. Old Bajen passed him and clapped him on the shoulder.

"Good work out there, lad," the old salt said. Josen thanked him and sat, as the cook pressed a mug of something hot and spiced into his chilled hands. Josen leaned back and took a sip, and saw Farhan, wrapped in a blanket, over beside the window.

"I thought you were blown overboard, Farhan," the boy chuckled.

"Fact is, I was, lad!" the gnome said. "It's one thing to keep your feet on a slippery deck when there are fierce winds about, and another entirely when you're facing down a sopping big wave that comes aboard to say hello. Washed me overboard like I was so much flotsam, it did." The gnome chuckled then, and took another sip of his spiced stew.

"So how'd you get back aboard?" the lad asked. "More sea-knights?"

The gnome's eyes twinkled then, and he quickly swallowed his mouthful of stew.

"Not today, no. Just good old-fashioned hanging on for dear life to the railing, mainly. But as for sea-knights..." He settled into his blanket a bit more comfortably and put up his feet.



You can be sure that I just stared at that great towering knight, then. I mean really -- a man from the sea in platemail? Boggles the mind. Well, the ogres held up a bit when they saw him (and the two others behind him, as I'd have seen if I weren't too busy gawking at the seahorse and spiral shell motif on the man's plate).

The zombies, on the other hand, did no such thing. They kept right on after. The man reached up and pulled off his helmet and just let it drop beside him. It didn't float, of course, but it didn't exactly sink as quickly as a steel helmet should, either. But I wasn't paying attention to that!

The fellow closed his eyes and then brought this gauntleted hands together, scooping water up out of the ocean. I figured he was casting a spell then, so I got out of the way. But I was wrong -- he didn't cast a spell.

"Into thy justice I commit these abomination, O Aventernus," he prayed. "Let the foul be purified!" The water in his hands began to glow in that weird way -- if you've ever seen a cleric turn the undead, you know it. Then he cast the glowing water into the ocean around him, just as the zombies neared.

The glow flashed through the water like it'd been struck by lightning -- from the reaction of the zombies, you'd think it had! They jerked, twitched and began smoking. I realized then what he'd done then -- he'd turned the seawater around them into holy water, just for a moment.

It was long enough, however, for the zombies to pause and try to flee the burning water.

It was also long enough for the witches to come upon the scene. So there we were, ogres hesitating at the water's edge, zombies being seared by seawater, me cowering behind the sea-knights.

I can't blame them for calling a retreat. One of the knights picked me up and whispered a spell, giving me the ability to breathe water. And then we dove!

If you ever get the chance to go beneath the waves, lad, you take it. It's terrifying and wonderful, let me tell you, and though I love to hear myself talk, I just haven't the proper words for it. Jewel-like fish instead of birds in the sky, with the occasional silhouette of something bigger just outside of your range to clearly make out. It's like diving into mystery, lad.

The sea-knights introduced themselves as Knights of the Pearl, an order of protector-paladins of the aventi people, a race of undersea humans. They told me a fascinating story about an ancient island kingdom that sank beneath the waves, but was protected and its people changed by their sea-king, a kindly god named Aventernus.

The knights' leader, Ghenor Olbareth, told me that they'd followed reports of the hag covey and their operation there -- causing storms to blow ships into the razor stacks that surround Shatterhull Isle, so they could collect the goods those ships carried -- for some time, but they'd only just found it. Indeed, they'd been following the *Iron Stalwart* to the isle, and were quite saddened to hear another paladin had met such a fate.

I stayed with them for more than a few weeks, lad, and learned some fine lessons from them about the ocean. I even stayed a bit to apprentice at the... er, fins... of an ally of theirs, the famed merfolk bard, Luansha. Well, famed below the sea, that is.

They returned me to shore a few months later, asking me to carry a message to a local noble on their behalf. I was sorry to leave their company, but glad to be of service.

New Magic Items: Special Materials

Metallurgy beneath the water is a rare and precious skill, but some aquatic folk have mastered this difficult art, creating unique materials from which to craft their weapons and armor. (See Special Materials on page 283 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.)

Pearlsteel: A strange metal crafted by secretive aventi metallurgists working near volcanic vents in the ocean floor, pearlsteel is gleaming, shining steel covered with a blue-white sheen like mother of pearl. Created from fine steel and rare silvery pearls found only in the ocean depths where the pressures alone would kill a land walker, pearlsteel is highly prized by all undersea races and constitutes a major trade item for the aventi.

Pearlsteel is very light, especially in water. Pearlsteel items weigh 25% less than their normal equivalents. Pearlsteel also slices more smoothly through the resistance that water presents. When a slashing weapon made of pearlsteel is used in the water, its damage is reduced by --1 rather than the normal --2 for fighting in the water with a slashing weapon, and its damage is reduced by --2 instead of half. Likewise, damage dealt underwater by a bludgeoning weapon made of pearlsteel is reduced by --2 rather than reduced by half.

Josen took a sip from his mug, his eyes rapt on Farhan, only to discover that he'd emptied it some time previous. Farhan took a final swallow from his own.

"That's... amazing," said Josen, grinning, the perils of the storm outside forgotten.

"Aye, I've been lucky," the gnome said. "But one thing to remember, lad -- the Old Lady Blue, the ocean, she harbors not a few mysteries and glories. Oh, certainly, there are terrors aplenty, and more than a few unpleasant times, but for those of us who love her true, the wonders she has to offer are more than worth it. Just remember to always treat her with the finest respect, as a true lady ought be treated, and you'll get along just fine."

With that, Farhan smiled, shrugged off the blanket, and made his way back onto deck, already whistling the crew's favorite work song. There was labor to be done in the wake of the storm, but no reason not to provide a little ditty to help speed it along.

New Feat: Sanctify Water [DIVINE]

You can call upon positive energy to momentarily transform normal water around you into holy water. This feat is often learned by the clerics and paladins of sea gods, as well as aquatic clerics of all stripes.

Prerequisites: Cha 13, ability to channel positive energy.

Benefit: By expending a daily turn undead attempt, you can infuse the water around you with positive energy, which has the same effect as holy water. All creatures in a 20-foot radius around you immediately take damage as though they'd been struck directly by a flask of holy water. The water retains positive energy for a number of rounds equal to 1 + your Charisma modifier, and deals damage each round. Creatures unaffected by holy water are similarly unaffected by this ability.

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